

Decision 03-12-047 December 18, 2003

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Application of the State of California,
Department of Transportation, for an order
authorizing the Department to replace the
existing 101/116 separation and overhead on U.S.
Route 101 in the City of Petaluma in the County
of Sonoma. (PUC No. 1085-37.50-A)

Application 03-07-048
(Filed July 31, 2003)

O P I N I O N

Summary

The State of California, Department of Transportation (Caltrans), requests authority to replace the existing U.S. Route 101/State Route 116 separation and overhead on U.S. Route 101 above the tracks of the Northwest Pacific Railroad Authority (NWP) in the City of Petaluma (City), in Sonoma County. The proposed grade-separated highway-rail crossing, identified as CPUC Crossing No. 1085-37.50-A, will widen Route 101 at this location to increase capacity and improve traffic flow by alleviating local truck traffic at the interchange.

Discussion

The U.S. Route 101/State Route 116 interchange is a four-lane elevated structure that carries U.S. Route 101 over Lakeville Street (State Route 116) and the tracks of the NWP in the City. Heavy trucks make up over 10% of the traffic on U.S. Route 101 and 6% on State Route 116. The on-ramp for traffic entering southbound U.S. Route 101 is a tight cloverleaf with traffic entering the roadway already on the incline of the overpass. Due to the sharpness of the current curve

and steepness of the current incline, trucks cannot reach highway speed until well after entering the traffic lane. A map of the project vicinity is set forth as Appendix B in the application.

The proposed grade-separated highway-rail crossing structure will improve the on-ramp to current standards and provide a truck-climbing lane to improve the local truck congestion in the area. The minimum clearances for the proposed structure will be in accordance with California Public Utilities Commission (Commission) General Order 26-D. During construction, temporary impaired clearances will be 19'-4" or greater and impaired horizontal clearance will be 10'-0" or greater.

Caltrans, acting by and through the California Transportation Commission, is the lead agency for this project under the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA), as amended, Public Resource Code Section 21000 et seq. On March 24, 2000 Caltrans determined that the project was categorically exempt under CEQA Guideline Section 15302, Replacement or Reconstruction and categorically excluded under National Environmental Protection Act.

The Commission is a responsible agency for this project under CEQA. We have reviewed the lead agency's Categorical Exemption Determination Form and find that it is adequate for our decision-making purposes. We also find that this project is categorically exempt from the requirements of CEQA pursuant to Section 15302.

The Commission's Consumer Protection and Safety Division - Rail Crossings Engineering Section (RCES) inspected the site and examined the need for, and safety of, the proposed crossing. RCES recommends that the authority to reconstruct the crossing be granted.

Application 03-07-048 meets the filing requirements of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, including Rule 39, which relates to the widening of an existing crossing.

In Resolution ALJ 176-3117 dated August 21, 2003, and published in the Commission Daily Calendar on August 22, 2003, the Commission preliminarily categorized this application as ratesetting, and preliminarily determined that hearings were not necessary. No protests have been received. Given these developments it is not necessary to disturb the preliminary determinations made in Resolution ALJ 176-3117.

This is an uncontested matter in which the decision grants the relief requested. Accordingly, pursuant to Public Utilities Code Section 311(g)(2), the otherwise applicable 30-day period for public review and comment is being waived.

Assignment of Proceeding

Richard Clark is the assigned Examiner in this proceeding.

Findings of Fact

1. Notice of the application was published in the Commission's Daily Calendar on August 4, 2003. No protests have been filed.
2. Caltrans requests authority, under Public Utilities Code Sections 1201-1205, to replace the existing grade-separated structure above the tracks of the NWP at U.S. Route 101, identified as CPUC Crossing No. 1085-37.50-A.
3. Public convenience and necessity require the reconstruction of the separated grade at U.S. Route 101 in Sonoma County.
4. Caltrans is the lead agency for this project under CEQA, as amended.
5. This project has been determined by Caltrans to be categorically exempt from the requirements of CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guideline Section 15302.

Conclusions of Law

1. The application is uncontested and a public hearing is not necessary.
2. We adopt Caltrans' finding that the project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guideline Section 15302.
3. The application should be granted as set forth in the following order.

O R D E R

IT IS ORDERED that:

1. The State of California, Department of Transportation, (Caltrans) is authorized to reconstruct a crossing at separated grade at State Route 101 above the tracks of the Northwest Pacific Railroad Authority (NWP) at the location as shown on the plans attached to the application, identified as CPUC No. 1085-37.50-A.
2. Clearances shall be in accordance with California Public Utilities Commission (Commission) General Order (GO) 26-D.
3. Walkways shall conform to GO 118. Walkways adjacent to track subject to rail operations shall be maintained free of obstructions and shall be promptly restored to their original condition in the event of damage during construction.
4. Construction and maintenance costs shall be borne in accordance with an agreement to be entered into between Caltrans and NWP (parties). Caltrans shall file a copy of the agreement with the Rail Crossings Engineering Section (RCES) prior to commencing construction. Should the parties fail to agree, the Commission will apportion the costs of construction and maintenance by further order.
5. Caltrans shall file approved final construction plans with RCES prior to commencing construction.

6. Within 30 days after completion of this project, NWP shall notify RCES in writing by submitting a completed Standard Commission Form G (Report of Changes at Highway Grade Crossings and Separations) that the authorized work is completed.

7. This authorization shall expire if not exercised within three years unless time is extended or if the above conditions are not complied with. Authorization may be revoked or modified if public convenience, necessity, or safety so require.

8. This application is granted as set forth above.

9. Application 03-07-048 is closed.

This order becomes effective 30 days from today.

Dated December 18, 2003, at San Francisco, California.

MICHAEL R. PEEVEY
President
CARL W. WOOD
LORETTA M. LYNCH
GEOFFREY F. BROWN
SUSAN P. KENNEDY
Commissioners